

**Private Lands Committee**  
**July 18, 2006**  
**Portage County Courthouse, Stevens Point**

**DNR Staff Present:** Scott Hull, Andrea Mezera, Brian Buenzow, Dave Sample, Tim Lizotte, Lesa Skuldt, Missy Sparrow, Jess Carstens, Harvey Halvorsen, Michelle Carlisle

**Others Present:** Sharon Schwab (Golden Sands RC&D), Art Kitchen (USFWS), Bob Weihrouch (NRCS), Jeff Gaska (Pheasants Forever)

**Introductions**

**2007 Farm Bill Update**

- The current 2002 Farm Bill expires in September 2007. The new Farm Bill is likely to have less funding, a strong energy title, and WTO implications. Wildlife interests are unknown.
- 2007 Farm Bill-How are wildlife interests represented?
  - Lots of individuals and bureaus within DNR are working on the farm bill (Barb Zellmer is the DNR point person on the Inter-agency Farm Bill team). Barb, Scott and Jim Bauman are putting together an informal DNR Farm Bill Working Group/discussion group. Look for more on this later. Many other partners are also involved including: NRCS, FSA, PF, DU, Wildlife Society, etc.
- Events leading up to Farm Bill 2007
  - USDA Theme Papers
  - Listening Sessions
  - Position Statements and White Papers by various organizations
- Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies 2007 Farm Bill position paper will be finalized in September 2006. Scott is involved in this process through the Associations Ag. Conservation Committee. <http://www.fishwildlife.org/>

**WI Farm Bill Update**

**CRP-Conservation Reserve Program**

- Acres enrolled in CRP are decreasing.  
WHY is CRP decreasing?
  - Farming Economics
    - Annual payments not indexed to inflation
    - Low soil rental rates
    - Increasing land values
    - Required management
    - Application (EBI) too complicated
  - Conservation Delivery

**WRP-Wetland Reserve Program**

- WI will be giving back between 5-6 million!! Implication is future allocation will likely decrease and of course fewer wetland projects will be implemented.

## **CREP-Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**

- About 43k acres enrolled so far

Enrollment has stagnated

## **Private Lands Issues**

- Tax 18
  - Suggested that the definition of agricultural land under Tax 18 be revised so that the use value formula is applied consistently to government subsidized and voluntary conservation activities conducted in Wisconsin's working landscapes.
- Prescribed burning on private lands
  - Concern over the slow turn-around time with DC review of burn plans

## **Farm Bill Policy/Private Lands Strategies**

- **Farm Bill Policy**
  - AFWA- Farm Bill working group and agricultural conservation committee
  - MAFWA- Private lands working groups
  - Mid-west Governor's Association
- **State-Local Level**
  - Revive private lands committee
  - Get active with FSA, NRCS, FWS, etc
  - Improve conservation delivery
  - Staff Training

## **Wisconsin Farm Bill Strategies - Compiled from Committee Input**

- Use of TSP funds
  - Funds could be used to hire biologists/LTEs or other means
  - Could hire regional private lands biologists
- Education
  - Provide training sessions for new wildlife biologists, technicians, and current staff (include forestry and warden staff?)
  - Create handouts to give to landowners, would need to be modified regionally
- There is a need to develop a DNR private lands initiative.
  - Important to include partners in initiative
  - Address need and provide a solution
- Create a grassland stewardship committee
- Need to work with FSA to receive names of CRP recipients
- Need to look at re-enrollment options
- Need to look into conservation easement program

- Landowner Contact
  - Need better enrollment; best way would be one on one contact with landowner.
  - Landowners need direct assistance
- Mid-term Management
  - Need to put together information about benefits of program (PF willing to put together information or publication related to mid-term management)

### **Upcoming Events**

- *CRP 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration* is tentatively set for October 19<sup>th</sup>. The Celebration will be a field day and hopefully include DNR secretary, folks from Washington, NRCS, FSA, and various partners (including: PF, WOW, NWTF, Trout Unlimited, Area RC&Ds, WBCI, etc). Event will be somewhere around the Madison area (Rock County?).
- *Greater Prairie Chicken Festival* will be held in 2007 (sometime in April)

### **Wrap-up**

- Plan is to provide committee with an outline of a Private Lands Initiative. Committee will likely reconvene to discuss Initiative early this fall. Goal is to have private lands committee meeting at least 2x a year. Future suggestion was to have a 2-day meeting.
- Suggestion to send out regular email updates regarding Farm Bill program
- Do we want to add a Forestry Rep. to the committee?
- A private lands committee page will be added to the Department's intranet site